

NEWS RELEASE

**USDA Forest Service
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401**



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Contact: **Lee Mabey**
Phone: **(208) 557-5784**

Improved Fishing Expected to Result from Work on the Buffalo River

Idaho Falls, ID: A new change at the Buffalo River Hydropower Project promises improvements to the Henry's Fork fishery below Island Park Dam. For the first time this past week fishery biologists were able to get a glimpse of what these changes might mean. On March 16, a fish trap was installed on the recently completed fishway. In the first six days, 38 fish were trapped as they exited, ranging in size from 4.5 to 17 inches. Most fish so far have been small rainbows and brook trout with a few kokanee trout. Past monitoring efforts show the spawning run of large rainbows should peak in April.

This project represents the culmination of years of effort by Fall River Rural Electric, Idaho Fish and Game, the Henry's Fork Foundation, Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Fall River deserves to be commended for the changes they have willingly made that will make this project as transparent to the fish as possible.

In a study completed by Mark Gamblin of Idaho Fish and Game and Rob VanKirk of Idaho State University in 1996, they estimated a Buffalo River that was fully seeded by 150-400 spawning rainbows could provide 63,000 to 32,000 age I and age II recruits to the Henry's Fork per year or up to 4,400 sixteen inch plus fish per year.

The other key to this project for the Henry's Fork is to improve first year over-winter survival of young trout. The Henry's Fork is not a hospitable place for these young fish when flows drop, habitat decreases and temperatures drop subzero. It is hoped, and studies by the Henry's Fork Foundation show, these small fish do try to migrate to more suitable areas. Now they will be able to migrate into the warmer Buffalo River.

The project was originally built in the 1930's to provide electricity during construction of the Island Park Dam. It was later used to provide power to Ponds Lodge. In 1976 the powerhouse burned to the ground. It was reconstructed in 1994 and returned to operation and was later purchased by Fall River Rural Electric.

In the late 90's a small fishway was built to bypass the concrete apron on the spillway. This fishway was monitored by the Henry's Fork Foundation and was estimated to pass up to 200 adult trout each year between February and May when the rainbow trout are migrating up river to spawn. This fishway however, did not help the fish with the steep approach caused by the 12 foot high rock rubble dam. During the re-licensing it was recognized by all that a better solution was needed. On November 5, 2004, Fall River Rural Electric received a new 40 year license to continue generating power.

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With license in hand, construction began in August 2005 and the plant was back in operation in November. The new facilities include an intake screen designed to prevent fish from entering the turbines and being injured or killed, a new face on the dam and a screen cleaner. The most visible change however, is the construction of a state of the art 270 foot long fishway that hugs the east bank of the river with the entrance snaking back to the base of the dam.

Time and fishermen will tell what the outcome of this project will ultimately have on the Henry's Fork but the results so far look very encouraging.